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ABSTRACT

Due mainly to the cultural reverence for the baccalaureate degree, there is a growing pressure from low income and minority groups to expand programs in continuing education. Various approaches to the problem have been tried (talent searches by colleges, open admissions) but have not proved successful. Although success and financing are problems, the major problem seems to be the development of skills and competencies in low income students. Researchers are still divided on the question of whether intellect is genetically or environmentally determined. However, there is abundant data relating to school achievement and school inefficiency and neglect in disadvantaged populations. Studies of desegregated schools indicate that achievement levels tend to rise with desegregation. Equality of education can only be reached if schools and society accept responsibility for developing conceptual, technical, social and political competence in the whole population. Three problems must be faced to equalize continuing education programs: modification of mental postures and learning patterns in inefficient young adult learners; the development of professional competence; and the necessity of involving the student in the developmental task. (Author/WI)

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CONTINUING AND RECURRENT EDUCATION:
PROBLEMS AND DEVELOPMENTS IN THE U.S. EFFORTS AT SERVING THE POOR

The continuation of post secondary education for persons below the middle income group in the U.S.A. has followed three patterns: 1) a small number of these persons have been admitted to and supported in the senior colleges. These low income students more generally attend the public colleges and a few of the church sponsored low cost private institutions. These students tend to follow the course pursued by more affluent students, they complete their studies in four or five years and then enter the labor force. 2) a second group, larger in numbers but not the majority, goes from high schools to the junior or community colleges where most pursue terminal technical courses of study, but some do preparatory work before transferring to senior colleges. Although the terminal as well as the senior college preparatory programs may be completed in two years of study, because many of these students work to support themselves and to pay for their studies, the pattern of education pursuit is much like that we associate with recurrent education. 3) the third group fits the more traditional concept of continuing or recurrent education. These young adults go from high school into the labor force, sometime after a brief period of training at a technical school or institute; sometimes they take such technical training at night while working during the day at jobs unrelated to the training they are pursuing.

It is these latter two groups, who from the low income communities make up the great bulk of candidates for recurrent education. It is important to distinguish these two groups from more privileged segments of the U.S. adult education population since continuing education

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takes many forms in the U.S. and income level influences the nature of the programs pursued. There are elaborate programs of continuing professional education. In almost every school district there are adult education programs directed at cultural self improvement and avocational pursuits. Excellent programs of specialized and technical training are sponsored by industries and commercia establishments for the upgrading of their employees. In centers where federal employees are concentrated government sponsored courses are available at several levels of study. In addition, as patterns of college attendance and completion are changing more and more young adults from middle and upper class families are moving in and out of formal study as the spirit moves them and are seeking their formal learning experiences at institutions and places that are convenient to them. This trend gives greater emphasis to selection of what one wants or needs than to meeting degree requirements. For this group periods of study are alternated with periods of work, travel or other activities. For them interest and convenience determine the when, what and where of continuing education while for the poor available money, required credential and employment situation greatly influence participation in continuing or recurrent education.

But the U.S. today is faced with a situation in which it can no longer afford the indulgence of viewing the issue of universal access to continuing education as a matter to be settled by chance or as a merely theoretical question. From a variety of sources, there is growing pressure to expand access to post-secondary education. As man increases his power over enviroment by means of technology, the fruit of his mental, rather than physical labors, there is an increasing demand within the more advanced societies, for conceptual and technical competence. It is to formal education that society turns as a means of insuring that its members are adequately prepared for participation in and meeting the demands of that more complex social order. The level of that essential preparation is increasingly seen as involving some form of post high school education.

In another sense, the pressure for access to continuing education can be viewed as a result of the overselling of the baccalaureate degree as the essential credential for upward mobility. The number of social and vocational opportunities for which the baccalaureate is cited as required constantly increases. Yet, there is an increasing divergence between the stated qualifications or the credentials required for career entry at a given status and the actual demands made on the worker who holds that status. Ivar Berg has documented this discrepancy in a number of employment situations. The gap usually lies between the competence associated with the demanded level of academic achievement and the actual competence which is required to do the job.

Another source of pressure on continuing education is the increasingly intense minority group insistence on being included in what society has deemed both desirable and essential; it was inevitable that Blacks, Puerto Ricans and Chicanos would demand a "slice of the education pie." The society has represented college and other forms of post secondary education as essential and as one of the good things in life. The civil rights revolution has made equal access to education one of its central demands. The press of minority groups to be included in the higher and continuing education population in greater numbers is part of that revolution. The relatively recent trend toward a more vocal demand for democratization of all aspects of U.S. society has been responsible also for political demands to make all education more relevant and responsive to the community's perception of its immediate needs, and to become more inclusive of the people whose presence will force it to become so.

In response to these various pressures, there have emerged several approaches to the problem of vastly increased demand for access. An early response to the problem was the search among students from minority groups for traditional patterns of talent. A pioneer in the use of this approach was the National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students, which made this

search a primary activity in its early days. However, when for a variety or reasons this exhaustive search did not produce sufficient new candidates who could measure up to the traditional college admission standards, some institutions began lowering admission requirements. Some experimented with modified standards, in order to allow for acceptance of "exceptional or "special" students, whose status as such might be determined by a high school record, which, although falling below the level traditionally demanded by the college, was thought to be non-reflective of the potential seen by his teachers or counselor, or by membership in a minority group, or by previous education in some way different from that of most incoming students, or by some special, perhaps bizarre, interest or orientation which the institution, anxious to be considered no less broadminded than any other, now found itself able to overlook.

But these approaches relied on the resources, the discretion, and the good will of the college and the various bodies within the college structure which were responsible for these decisions at any given time. It was inevitable that there should be more pressure for the implementation of a system which should be fairer at least in the sense that it would take the decision about every student's future out of the hands of a small body of men. The most obvious such demand, and one to which public institutions are particularly vulnerable, is the cry for open enrollment. Unfortunately, the implementation of this strategy so far, notably at CUNY in New York, has been a political response, and many observers at all points on the political spectrum question its value as a pedagogical solution. They fear that it will throw the doors open wide without doing anything about the program or system into which the hordes will flow. Fear is expressed that academic standards will be shattered or that students will fail in large numbers. The most serious immediate problem with open enrollment is one related to space and facilities. Our system of higher education is not large enough to accommodate all the young people we graduate from secondary schools. Even though in 1972, the U.S. was opening a new community college

at a rate of almost one per day, facilities have not matched the requirements of universal access.

A modification of this demand is the goal of guaranteed opportunity for admission to some form of post-secondary education. Attempts are being made in different parts of the country, especially in the form of the community college, to implement this goal, but there are problems even here which range from those faced by the mediocre but interested student who is pressured into vocational courses when he would like a further sampling of academics, or the low income student with a good to impressive record who is admitted by a community college, ostensibly with open arms, but cannot possibly afford to attend because he is offered no financial assistance, to those students who are sorted into dysfunctional tracks from which they cannot escape. In an effort at avoiding the personal preferences and prejudices of college admissions officers and other officials and of also avoiding overtaxing existing resources, the use of the admissions lottery has been proposed. This method, which has been suggested as part of a variety of plans, sometimes in combination with the preferences of college officials and prospective students, involves the pooling of applicants and the random selection of the admission cadre for a given year.

A more comprehensive proposal, and one which is perhaps at the heart of the best of the variety of intentions behind all the other approaches, is guaranteed opportunity for a reasonable chance at success in college for all students willing to try. Whether by lottery or by open enrollment all students admitted would be guaranteed access to higher education so long as they were willing to keep trying and the institution would provide such services as are necessary to their success. Obviously this is a utopian dream toward which no institution is as yet working.

However, the 1972 Education Ammendments passed by the U.S. Congress do provide for

the first time the beginning fiscal basis for such opportunities. Under the sponsorship of Senator Pell the U.S. Congress has laid the legislative bare for providing to each citizen who chooses to use it, a cost of continuing education allowance at a maximum of $1,400 per annum which may be used for post secondary education. To avoid giving the impression that we have made more progress than in fact is the case, let me hasten to add that Senator Pell was able to get this provision included in the legislation only after it was ammended to stipulate that no applicant could receive cost of education allowance greater than 50% of the total annual cost of his education. In addition the size of the allowance would have to be reduced by another percentage based upon the income level of the student's family. Despite these restrictions, the basic thrust of the legislation is to make available to personse who choose to continue their education, an allowance which they may use to purchase continuing educational services at institutions of their own choosing. As the size of the allowance is increased, this legislation could go far in easing the financial problems associated with continuing education for the poor.

But the problems of access to continuing education resources or the personal financing of its cost may not be the most crucial issues. When one examines the utilization of post-secondary educational opportunities by low income and minority groups in the U.S. it becomes clear that progress in completion of courses of study and the resultant development of competences, skills and understanding are as yet unsolved problems. These issues are related to the characteristics of the populations to be served and the functions of continuing and higher education.

There is a considerable body of research relating to the characteristics of low income and ethnic minority groups in the U.S. Most of this work can be classified under two broad categories: the first of these might be called the study of population characteristics, and the second,

the description and superficial evaluation of programs and practices. In the first of these categories, investigators placed heavy emphasis on the enumeration and description of what are regarded as deficits in the conditions or behavior of the target population - the ways the groups studied differ from an alleged "normal" population. These "deficits" are used to account for the observed dysfunctions in educational performance among the members of those groups.

Studies within this category can be further divided between research into performance and research into life conditions. The largest body of research concerns one type of performance characteristic, intellectual status. Most studies in this area concentrate on IQ testing results and consistently support the hypothesis that high economic, ethnic or social status is associated with high intellectual status; the reverse also shows consistently - that is, poor children earn lower scores than rich children; lower class children score lower than middle and upper class children; blacks and other minority groups do not do as well as whites. Some of these studies included some speculative discussion in an attempt to interpret their results. In one extreme, investigators see their work as supporting assumptions concerning genetic determinants of intelligence; at the other end of the spectrum, researchers report their work in a context of support for the prominence of environmental factors in determining intellectual status. A few have continued the long tradition of alleged association between race, genetics, and quality of intellect. However, the largest group now working in the field tends to interpret the data as reflective of a complex interaction between hereditary and environmental forces in the determination of the quality of intellect.

In contrast to the huge body of research and statistics concerning intellectual status, there has been only a limited amount of effort directed at the analysis of qualitative aspects of intellectual function in target populations. Work in this second area included the efforts of some who tried to factor-analyze standardized tests, and many who tried to identify differential deficits and strengths in the functioning of the disadvantaged populations. A landmark

in this area is the work of Lesser and associates, who tried to identify by ethnic groups differential patterns of intellectual function. Their work focuses on the identification of qualitative aspects of intellectual function, as opposed to the more common concern with the identification of intellectual status in quantitative terms.

A third area encompassing a considerable body of research deals with plasticity of intellectual development. Building upon Binet's early concern with the trainability of intellect and Montesorri's efforts at modifying intellectual function in children of subnormal performance levels, investigators worked with mildly or severely retarded children as well as with normal and below-average children. These studies led to mixed findings, yielding no definitive conclusion about the plasticity of intellect. Some reports show intervention to be associated with modest or no significant change in intelligence test scores. Many of these modest changes have been interpreted as reflecting a normal fluctuation in intellectual function from one test period to another. However, some studies have shown significant differences in the level of post treatment test scores, but these improvements have not yet been shown in large population studies or over a period of time long enough to justify definitive conclusions. In these more promising studies some skeptics maintained that the initial measurement of intellectual status was wrong, and they elected to use the final higher score as the more accurate measure. However, there continues in such research the nagging conviction that Binet may have been right, that intelligence is a trainable function. The best available data leads one to conclude that significant changes in the quality of intellectual function are more likely to result to the extent that radical positive changes in environmental interactions occur before the consolidation of adolescence. There is little research or opinion supportive of the view that intellectual function continues to be significantly malleable into the late adolescent and adult periods of life.

A contribution worthy of note in this area is that of Zigler, who attempts to account for changes in the quality of intellectual function on the basis of changes in the affective state (motivation, task involvement, etc.). He uses his data to support the conclusion that affective processes are more malleable than cognitive processes, and implies that changes in the affective area as well as concerted attention to the conative (skills development) area can result in limited shifts in cognitive achievement. However, these changes are not viewed as shifts in the character of the basic cognitive function, but rather as the products of motivation and skill development. Zigler's view of the stable character of the basic cognitive processes reflects the position advanced by Bloom, who argues that the processes underlying intellectual functions rapidly lose their plasticity following about the third year of life. However, Bloom does not make it clear whether he views this stability as resulting from a rapidly reduced susceptibility to environmental influences or a heightened dependence upon earlier established patterns of stimulus-processing. Zigler's concern with the possible bi-modal distribution of intelligence, with greater representation of abstract processes of mentation in the higher modal score group and higher representation of concrete operations in the lower score group, may provide an adequate explanation for the stability both investigators refer to.

In a recent report, Jensen supported this view of the stable nature of the cognitive aspect of intellectual function by arguing for a view of intelligence as primarily genetically determined. This retreat to genetics to explain the failure of education to significantly modify academic achievement in minority and low income groups is considered by many to be unfortunate. Not only have educational treatments been insufficiently refined or applied but genetic research is certainly not far enough advanced to enable us to say to what extent heredity accounts for the quality of intellectual function. Our best judgment leads to the conclusion

that a complex interaction prevails which is as yet not clearly understood. Since educators are not able to influence the genetic constitutions of learners, our only option is to work harder at making that interaction significant.

There is an abundance of performance characteristics data relating to school achievement and school inefficiency and neglect in disadvantaged populations. Whether the populations studied are urban or rural, poor blacks, poor whites, poor Puerto Rican, poor Mexican-American or poor American Indians, when attrition rate is used as an index to school inefficiency and neglect, disadvantaged youngsters rate high. There are no characteristics which identify these young people more accurately than the low income status of their families, the disorganization of their community and family life and their low academic achievement. Similarly children from low income and minority groups consistently show lower achievement levels. However, at least one significant observation emerges from these consistently pessimistic data. The patterns of achievement differentials among lower status groups are not independent of the circumstances under which they attend school. Data collected through the 1930s and 1940s showed that blacks educated in the South attained lower achievement levels than black children educated in Northern schools. As Southern blacks moved north and west, their achievement levels rose. In these instances researchers have not been able to determine whether the improvement was a result of selective migration, better schools or both. In contrast, data compiled during the 1960s tended to show black youngsters in urban Southern schools demonstrating higher achievement levels than black students in urban Northern schools. Here, again, it is not clear whether the difference should be attributed to the pattern of migration, perhaps changed in this decade, or to the relative quality of the schools. It is also to be noted that during the late 1940s and early 1950s the South was pouring money into its black schools in an effort to avoid

desegregation, while at the same time the quality of education in the Northern urban ghetto schools was drastically declining as black enrollment in these schools increased to the point that in some instances blacks were in the majority.

An area of research complementing these examinations of performance characteristics among disadvantaged children is the study of their life conditions, and how these factors may relate to school performance. In terms of school environment, one important condition is the degree of separation imposed on the child as a result of his ethnic origin, his socio-economic status, or both. The great body of research concerning the relationship between racial separation and school achievement is associated with the concentration of minority group students in separate school situations with the one possible exception of those schools predominantly populated by Oriental children. Similarly, the evidence overwhelmingly supports the association between separation by economic group and school achievement with low economic status being associated with low school achievement. Consistently, poor children attending school in poor neighborhoods tend to display low-level school achievement.

Before-and-after studies of desegregated schools have also tended to show that achievement levels rise with desegregation, although the exact interplay of reactions leading to this result has not yet been conclusively defined. For example, the process of desegregation may, by improving teacher morale or bringing about other changed conditions, result in an over-all increase in the quality of education throughout the system. There have been a number of studies examining the possible relationship of integration (along racial or status group lines) and achievement, and the over-all results of these efforts appear to demonstrate that children from lower status groups attending schools where pupils from higher status families are in the majority attain improved achievement levels, with no significant lowering of achievement for the higher status group. However, when children from higher status groups are in the minority

in the school, there tends not to be an improvement in the achievement of the lower status group.

Although these findings are generally supported in mass data compiled from large-scale populations, studies of minority group performance under experimental conditions of ethnic mix suggest a need for caution in making similar observations for smaller populations and individual cases. From these findings it becomes clear that the impact of assigned status and perceived conditions of comparison (that is, the subjects' awareness of the norms against which their data will be evaluated) results in a quite varied pattern of performance on the part of the lower status group subjects. Thus, it may be dangerous to generalize that across-the-board economic and social class integration will automatically result in positive improvement for the lower status group.

These population characteristics have important implications for educational planning in general but have special meaning when they are related to the functions of continuing education in democratic societies. What are these functions. There are probably several. I have mentioned a credentialling function through which persons are enabled to meet entry or advancement requirements for a variety of vocational and social pursuits. There is also a function related to the development of professional and technical competence and skills. And finally there are functions related to the development of intellect and the aesthetics of intellectuality without reference to credentialling or professional/technical skills development. In general, then, it may be said that the functions of continuing education completely overlap with the functions of all post-secondary education - the stimulation and development of those qualities of intellectual, technical, social and political behaviors which are essential to the maintenance and advance of the society in as broad a segment of the society as its level of development may require at the time.

In centuries past, that function was adequately served when provided for the religious and political elite. Later it was extended to also include the financially elite. In this century we have been able to include the intellectually elite and a fair number of the more ambitious masses.

But two things have changed. First, increasingly the society's survival is seen as dependent on the extent to which these essential behaviors exist on a sophisticated level in all segments and for most of our population. Second, just as the 20th Century has required that for survival we harness the forces of nature through science for the humanistic development of the society, survival in the 21st Century will require the harnessing of the forces of man through science for the humanistic development of the society.

These circumstances place on the society a responsibility for making continuing education universally available, and a parallel responsibility to develop ways to achieve conceptual, technical, social, and political competence in that widely varied population.

It is these democratizing and humanistic functions of the college which must be raised to the level of highest priority before we can arrive at sensible programs of continuing education for the emerging period. The tremendous technological development of the society places us now in the position to free the resources needed for this shift in priority. The U.S.A., with a gross national product which has recently reached 1 trillion dollars, can afford the investment in education which is necessary to improve our gross human product. Without this investment we simply cannot solve the problems of post-secondary and continuing education.

With or without more adequate resources we will need to turn attention to problems in the area of curriculum design in which the multiple functions of continuing education and the characteristics of the target population are taken into account. There are at least three concerns which should be important influences on our work: (1) the utilization and

modification of mental postures and learning patterns in inefficient or less well prepared young adult learners; (2) a problem faced in work with all students, the development of professional competence and expansion of intellectual development; and (3) the problem of sufficiently involving the student in the developmental task, the process of somehow bridging the gap between the student's perception of the institution as irrelevant to the concerns of his life so far, and the institution's own, sometimes overblown, notion of its own relevance for life as it is institutionally conceived.

Our earlier expressed concern with detailed, sophosticated qualitative information on the nature of the learning process in young adults who have not traditionally functioned well in academic settings could provide the data from which appropriate teaching-learning strategies can be developed. These strategies may range from shifts in the context and nature of the material to be mastered through the devising of alternate input for the acquisition of knowledge banks for those students who suffer from major deficits in information as well as impaired skills for acquiring it, to the design of elaborate instructional procedures which utilize sophisticated devices to monitor learner behavior in response to materials which are programmed to complement idiosyncratic patterns of affective-cognitive function.

To supplement activity at any one of these levels we will need to continue and expand what appears to be the relatively successful use of tutorials and individual work with students around their specific learning needs. Independent study centers have the advantage of not negatively identifying a student " in trouble" since they are also used for bright students who wish to supplement their regular school experience as well as for students working at a slower pace who require some kind of assistance.

As is the case in elementary and secondary schools, our focus on special populations calls attention to general inefficiencies in pedagogical practice for all students; post-secondary education's responsibility for intellectual development requires constant work at improving curriculum. In this area, the Thirteen College Curriculum Program, directed specifically at the populations served by thirteen predominantly black institutions, provides a useful model insofar as resources and time are set aside to allow college teachers to think about and work on improvement of collegiate instruction. Attention to curriculum development at the college level is long overdue, and is critical for disadvantaged students in particular, as well as being entirely appropriate to post-secondary education in general.

I find it difficult to abandon my preoccupation with the development of strategies for directly attacking the problem of improvement of cognitive function, but I cannot be oblivious to the mounting evidence that fundamental changes in the character of cognitive function may not be susceptible to direct attack, although derivative changes may flow from work in the affective area, which Zigler argues is more malleable than the cognitive. Hence, the third aspect of effort at improvement in curriculum development is in this area we call motivation and task involvement. Here the problem is to make the relevance of the essential aspects of the learning tasks of continuing education more apparent to the youngsters served. Information management, mastery of knowledge, and intellectual competence and skills are not irrelevant to real life in the society, but complexed modern societies often appear to distort and prostitute the purposes toward which these knowledges, skills, and competencies are utilized. When the university becomes an accomplice in this process of distortion, we are subverting the goals and objectives that are fundamental to our purposes. When science is used to exploit and victimize humanity instead of to help it, it is

indeed hard to perceive the relevance of the sciences. When economics is used to exploit, colonize, and enslave, it becomes difficult to excite an honest student about the study of this discipline. When I, as a professor, use my discipline to achieve my own personal ends and glory rather than to further more general social goals, my students cannot be expected to respect me or use me as a model. Many young people see in the university a haven for the glorification of knowledge for knowledge's sake, rather than a concern for knowledge for the service of humanity; a mecca for the individual academic entrepreneur rather than a community for scholars devoted to the facilitation of human development. Such perceptions make difficult, if not impossible, their identification with these institutions.